

Viab!e Research **Visible Results**



Annual Report
2011-2012

Nebraska Center for Research on
Children, Youth, Families & Schools







Susan M. Sheridan, PhD

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Educational Psychology

Director, Nebraska Center for Research
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Message from the Director

The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools operates on the philosophy that progress stems from knowledge – and that truly viable knowledge originates from the deliberate, rigorous research that has become our hallmark. In this spirit, we have devoted years to acquiring new information, validating existing ideas, and reconsidering long-held beliefs. We have become fluent in the languages of the academe: theories and hypotheses, citations and footnotes, data and statistics. And we have grown the knowledge base by contributing to the academic journals, handbooks and monographs that fill our shelves.

Yet, in doing so, we have not forgotten the purposes underlying this process – the purposes upon which our center was built. To develop and impart practices that help people overcome their most acute challenges. To provide tools that give individuals and communities the opportunities to attain the happiness, success and security they seek. To assemble talented and committed minds whose visions become the pathways to progress. In sum, to conduct research that yields visible results.

Over the past year, we have embraced these ideals by commencing much research and unveiling many findings. In turn, we have shared the results of our efforts with those who have admirably dedicated themselves to the direct support of children, youth, families and schools. The collective promise of this work continually restores the undivided energy, attention and enthusiasm it commands. And so, as we invite you to help us take stock of the past year, we eagerly anticipate the work that awaits us in the next. Then, as now, we will continue to value the magnitude of viable research – and the visible results it makes possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan M. Sheridan". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'S' at the beginning.

Susan M. Sheridan



Our Mission

To advance the conduct of high-quality interdisciplinary research to promote the intellectual, behavioral and social-emotional development and functioning of individuals across educational, familial and community contexts. Central to this is enhancing our understanding of how these complex systems work dynamically to support the future of our nation.




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About CYFS

We create the context for researchers, in partnership with community stakeholders, to establish reliable findings; inform and influence the knowledge base; translate findings into evidence-based practices; and provide scientifically grounded education, leadership and outreach. The infrastructure of CYFS supports the establishment of prevailing initiatives to impact the lives of children, youth, families and schools.

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Viable Research



At CYFS, we see research as an avenue for understanding and improving the systems that shape the trajectories of people's lives. Sometimes this involves charting paths to their destinations, as when we map novel methods for teaching science or explore how parents can help their children succeed. Sometimes it means addressing roadblocks that threaten to impede their progress, as when we begin pinpointing the risks of child maltreatment. And sometimes it consists of supporting them at the start of a difficult journey, as when we extend hands to the teen parents of infants. Collectively, these efforts represent a small but telling cross-section of the viable research that has, does and will continue to define CYFS.

Ensuring Science Classrooms Foster Inquiring Minds



WHY HAVE AMERICA'S STUDENTS FALLEN BEHIND THEIR INTERNATIONAL PEERS WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING SCIENCE? THE TRUTH MAY LIE IN THE WAY IT'S BEING TAUGHT. RESEARCHERS FROM THE COACHING SCIENCE INQUIRY IN RURAL SCHOOLS PROJECT ARE ON THE CASE.

The revolutionary theories of gravity, evolution and electromagnetism arose not from memorizing facts and vocabulary, but from asking insightful questions, collecting relevant evidence, and applying data to devise and test hypotheses.

With this in mind, the CYFS-housed National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed) has undertaken efforts to help revitalize science education by promoting the practice of these strategies in classrooms throughout the rural United States.

An R²Ed research team led by Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz and Jon Pedersen is examining how professional development and coaching efforts influence teachers' knowledge and implementation of guided scientific inquiry, a classroom approach designed to help students master the methods that scientists use to study the natural world.

Nugent noted that guided scientific inquiry emphasizes curiosity, critical thinking and creativity over the more static approaches that have character-

ized traditional science instruction in the United States.

"Recent research has suggested that this approach leads to greater student achievement in science than the more traditional approaches using standard textbooks and materials," Nugent said.

Nugent and her colleagues are recruiting the participation of more than 160 middle and high school science teachers from communities in rural Nebraska and surrounding states. The

***The National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)** is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and housed in the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.*

The Center's long-term goals are to (a) improve students' acquisition of reading and science knowledge and skills by identifying effective practices that lead to the systematic provision of evidence-based instruction in rural settings; and (b) establish an infrastructure for conducting and disseminating nationally relevant, cutting-edge research and leadership related to rural education.



Learn more at r2ed.unl.edu



FROM LEFT: JAMES HOUSTON, PROJECT DIRECTOR OF THE COACHING SCIENCE INQUIRY IN RURAL SCHOOLS STUDY, IS WORKING ALONGSIDE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS GWEN NUGENT AND GINA KUNZ TO EXAMINE TEACHERS' LEARNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDED INQUIRY APPROACH.

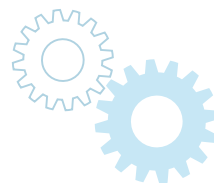


research team will randomly assign roughly half of the teachers to receive training in guided scientific inquiry, while the remaining participants will continue teaching science as they previously have.

In addition to gauging the impact on teachers' inquiry knowledge, skills and practice, researchers will assess how the resulting classroom lessons influence students' knowledge of scientific concepts and inquiry principles. Accordingly, the team will document students' willingness and ability to engage scientific questions; utilize

the evidence at their disposal; and formulate, evaluate and communicate proposed explanations.

"The research results should help us identify how to best instruct educators in inquiry methods," she said, "ultimately advancing our understanding of how to improve science education."



More than 160 middle and high school science teachers from communities in rural Nebraska and surrounding states are expected to participate in the CSI in Rural Schools study. To learn more about the project, please visit csiruralschools.unl.edu.

Solving the Puzzle of Parent Participation in Education

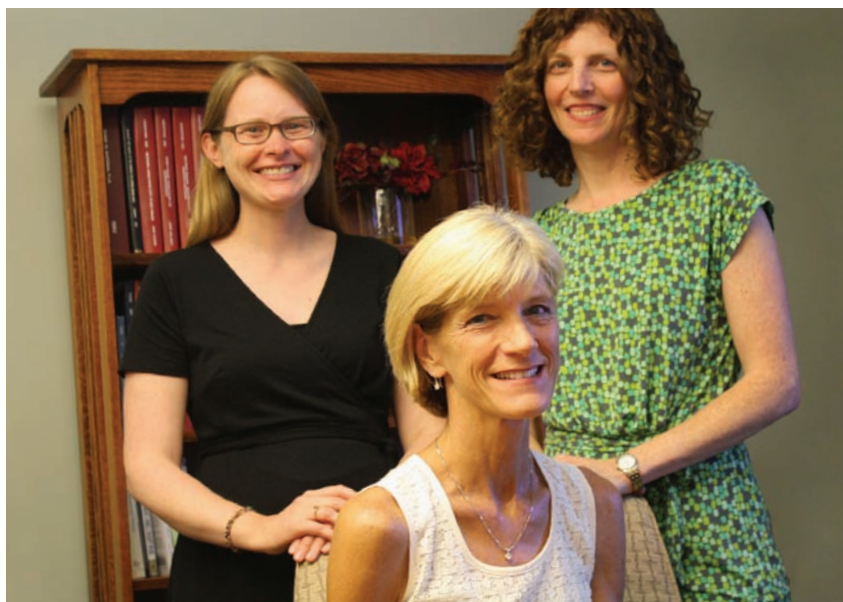


WHY SIFT THROUGH MORE THAN 25,000 RESEARCH STUDIES? TO GET AT THE TRUTH OF QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ENDURED FOR DECADES. NAMELY: WHAT'S THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO HELP PARENTS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADUATION?

If research studies represent the jigsaw pieces to complex puzzles, meta-analyses assemble them into cohesive pictures that help resolve important questions.

CYFS Postdoctoral Fellow Elizabeth Moorman Kim and CYFS Director Susan Sheridan, a Willa Cather Professor of Educational Psychology, are currently gathering those pieces to clarify the impacts of two intervention-based approaches for engaging parents in their children's education.

Moorman Kim and Sheridan recently received a U.S. Department of Education grant that will allow them to collect, analyze and draw conclusions from several decades' worth of investigations into parents' influence on K-12 student outcomes. Though many studies have suggested that parental participation can improve academic achievement, inconsistencies and oversights in definitions, methodologies and results



From left: CYFS Faculty Affiliate Elizabeth Moorman Kim, CYFS Director Susan Sheridan and the University of Texas at Austin's Tasha Beretvas are leading a meta-analysis of parents' engagement in their children's education. The project will result in the country's largest database of research related to parental involvement and family-school partnerships.





The research team is combing through more than 25,000 research studies to identify those suitable for the meta-analysis. The study sprang from a 2010 CYFS-coordinated working meeting that assembled more than 20 of the country's top family-school researchers.

have left lingering questions and a lack of consensus.

The researchers will address a number of these issues with an eye toward offering the most comprehensive and specific conclusions to date. Unlike its predecessors, the meta-analysis will distinguish between parent involvement and family-school partnership models of intervention. While the former encourage activities such as helping with homework and reading to children, the latter focus on fostering two-way communication and joint decision-making between parents and teachers.

"In the literature, we use a lot of words interchangeably, but they don't necessarily mean the same thing," Moorman Kim said. "There's been a growing focus on how we get parents and schools to establish relation-

ships with one another, beyond just getting them involved with activities at the school. We're trying to tease apart these different concepts that are often lumped together under one umbrella."

Moorman Kim noted that findings from the meta-analysis should generate recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking the best

ways to engage parents and, by extension, improve student development.

"In addition to summarizing what we know from the literature, meta-analysis also helps us to highlight what we don't know," Moorman Kim said. "It could help foster more research when we see that there are not very many – or even no – studies addressing what could be really important factors."

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I think there's been a growing focus on how we get parents and schools to establish relationships with one another, beyond just getting them involved with activities at the school. We're trying to tease apart these different concepts that are often lumped together under one umbrella.

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Taking Educational Steps in the Rural Direction



CAN A HOME-BASED INTERVENTION PROGRAM REACH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES? AN ONGOING STUDY THAT STRETCHES FROM THE MIDWEST TO THE SOUTH PROMISES TO OFFER COMPREHENSIVE INSIGHTS INTO ITS IMPACTS.

When it comes to preparing rural children for school, CYFS Faculty Affiliate Helen Raikes hopes to show that home is where the heart of the matter is.

Raikes is leading a five-year assessment of Early Steps to School Success (ESSS), a home visitation intervention directed at high-risk children and families in rural communities. Alongside colleagues from the University of Maryland and George Mason University, Raikes is examining whether ESSS improves children's language and literacy skills, social-emotional development, and parental support for their learning.

The study, which focuses on children from birth to age 3, is assessing 20 newly implemented ESSS sites throughout Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Designed to eventually gather data from 1000 children, the study is among the first to systematically evaluate a home-based school readiness intervention for rural communities. These frequently isolated communities face unique challenges that require informed perspectives and tailored strategies, Raikes said.

"Families in rural communities have fewer options for services than their



Helen Raikes, PhD

counterparts in urban and suburban communities," said Raikes, a Willa Cather Professor of Child, Youth and Family Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "They are less likely to have exposure to the messages that home visitation programs impart."

Raikes and her colleagues are exploring how ESSS affects children's auditory comprehension, expressive communication and picture vocabulary. They are also investigating

Designed to eventually gather data from 1000 children, the study is among the first to systematically evaluate a home-based school readiness intervention for rural communities.



whether the program influences children’s positive and negative behaviors in the home.

To better understand the intervention, the researchers will analyze how families’ native language and children’s developmental risk alter its effects. They will also determine whether certain aspects of the program, including the number of offered services and the quality of parent-staff relationships, shape its impact on child and family outcomes.

The team is inspecting multiple dimensions of parental support, including the frequency of home-based reading activities and the quality of

home environments. In addition to measuring the efforts of caretakers, the team will evaluate the ability of interventionists to provide appropriate coaching, emotionally invest in families, and promote harmony within the program and the home.

If the study finds such impacts, Raikes said, it could facilitate the program’s introduction to more communities that have traditionally lacked the services it provides.

“A program such as ESSS can target an entire rural community population,” Raikes said. “[Demonstrating] results could make more such programs accessible to rural families.”

Isolated rural communities frequently lack access to home visitation programs. Raikes believes the current study can inform the development of programs that effectively promote positive outcomes among children and families in rural populations.



Gaining a Head Start on Preventing Maltreatment



HOW CAN PRACTITIONERS IDENTIFY CHILDREN AT RISK FOR MALTREATMENT BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE? A MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTANT-TURNED-SCHOLAR KNOWS HOW DAUNTING THE PROBLEM CAN SEEM. NOW SHE'S DOING HER PART TO HELP SOLVE IT.

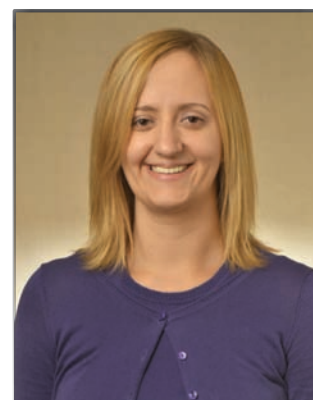
The Early Head Start program aims to give young children exactly that. However, the program has fought a recurring battle against the maltreatment of those children by the same low-income families it seeks to assist.

In 2009, CYFS Doctoral Student Affiliate Grace Hubel began working as a mental health consultant with a local Early Head Start center in Lincoln, Nebraska. Through her interactions with families and conversations with staff, Hubel realized that the program's children seemed especially susceptible to the neglect and abuse that research

has linked with psychiatric disorders, poor communication skills and anti-social behavior.

"There's certainly a systemic level of risk present in impoverished families, and I definitely experienced many kids crossing the line from being at-risk to becoming victims of abuse and neglect while in the program," Hubel said. "Wanting to help those families is what interested me in maltreatment prevention."

With those experiences as motivation, Hubel is now studying how Early Head Start services influence the risk and incidence of child maltreatment among participating families. Using secondary data gleaned from roughly 400 families with children under age 3, Hubel is examining the presence of common risk factors – including poverty, mental health issues, sub-



Grace Hubel

Hubel's study, which serves as the basis for her dissertation, is the first to examine links between child maltreatment and the Early Head Start program.

stance abuse and unemployment – before and during participation in the program. She is also using Nebraska court records to determine how these services and risk factors correlate with instances of maltreatment, the rehabilitation of abusive parents, and the outcomes of subsequent custody cases.



BASED ON PRELIMINARY RE-
SEARCH, HUBEL EXPECTS THAT
ROUGHLY 30% OF THE STUDY'S
PARTICIPATING FAMILIES WILL
HAVE A SUBSTANTIATED CASE
OF MALTREATMENT DURING
THEIR ENROLLMENT IN THE
EARLY HEAD START PROGRAM.



Hubel will also interview parents of children currently participating in Early Head Start. She hopes to gain insights into which aspects of the program attract and retain families, while also garnering parents' ideas on how to improve it.

Hubel believes the study, which is the first to investigate the association between maltreatment and Early Head Start, has the potential to inform interventionists tasked with making countless tough calls when it comes to protecting children.

"The reality is that you're always going to be working with families at risk on multiple levels," Hubel said. "I hope we can provide a little bit of information about where to start."

A CYFS PEDIGREE

David Hansen, a CYFS Faculty Affiliate, serves as Hubel's advisor and is assisting her with the Early Head Start study. In addition to his role as Co-Director of the Family Interaction Skills Clinic, Hansen serves as Chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Helping Teen Parents Become First Teachers



CAN TEEN PARENTS WHO ONCE ENJOYED THE LUXURIES OF CAREFREE SUMMERS AND FLEXIBLE FUTURES SUCCESSFULLY READY THEIR CHILDREN FOR PRESCHOOL? A CYFS RESEARCHER HAS ADAPTED A PROGRAM THAT SHE HOPES WILL HELP ADOLESCENTS COPE WITH THEIR NEWFOUND CHALLENGES.

The vast majority of teens spend more time bargaining with their parents than contending with the challenges of becoming one. A few, however, face the realities of parenthood – and preparing their own children for preschool before even finishing high school.

In response, CYFS Postdoctoral Fellow Kristin Rispoli is gauging the effectiveness of a program she's adapted specifically to help teen parents navigate their unique challenges.

Rispoli developed and has now begun evaluating Parents Interacting with Infants-Teen (PIWI-T), a program designed to promote parenting prac-

tices that cultivate young children's "school readiness" – the cognitive, language and socio-emotional skills crucial to academic success. The PIWI-T program aims to strengthen parent-infant interactions and relationships by building parents' confidence, providing developmental information, and modeling effective practices. PIWI-T also shows parents how to implement strategies – such as playing with infants and introducing them to books – conducive to early school readiness.

According to Rispoli, previous research has found that school readiness profoundly influences the likelihood that children will reach their potential.

"School readiness skills are crucial for ensuring children's long-term success in the classroom and beyond. Children who are unprepared for the transition to formal



Kristin Rispoli, PhD

schooling struggle academically throughout the elementary years and are less likely to complete high school," Rispoli said. "For these reasons, the cognitive, verbal, behavioral and socio-emotional skills that children obtain throughout early childhood are essential to support school readiness."

However, Rispoli noted that immaturity, financial struggles and a lack

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Adolescent parents are often marginalized in society and face personal, social and economic barriers to providing adequate supports for their children's learning and socio-emotional development.

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RISPOLI NOTED THAT APPROXIMATELY 34 OUT OF EVERY 1000 AMERICAN CHILDREN ARE BORN TO ADOLESCENT PARENTS. SHE HAS DEVELOPED AND IS NOW EVALUATING A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO HELP THESE TEENS FOSTER DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS FOR THEIR CHILDREN.



of child-rearing knowledge represent considerable hurdles for many adolescent parents. These factors often lead to poor parenting practices and, in turn, young children who are less prepared than their peers for the rigors of formal education.

“Adolescent parents are often marginalized in society and face personal, social and economic barriers to providing adequate supports for their children’s learning and socio-emotional development,” she said.

Rispoli also observed that children’s outcomes often receive little attention

from adolescent-focused parenthood programs.

“Many interventions designed to support adolescent parents focus solely on their personal outcomes, such as graduation from high school and avoiding future pregnancies. While important, these outcomes overlook the fact that many adolescent parents lack the skills necessary to support their children’s development,” said Rispoli, whose work is being funded by the Society for the Study of School Psychology.

“The PIWI-T program has the potential to significantly increase teen parents’

engagement with their children and their ability to effectively support early academic and socio-emotional functioning,” she said, “thereby preparing their children for a successful transition into kindergarten and ensuring they are on track for academic and personal success.”



Visible Results



CYFS undertakes studies in search of answers to fundamental yet profound questions. What do children, youth, families and schools need to succeed? How can we help them acquire it? These questions have driven us toward understanding how we can best prepare children for school, use robotics to help them learn, and identify those susceptible to dyslexia. They have encouraged us to support students in Haiti and garner insights that can improve professional learning for teachers throughout the United States. And they have motivated us to accumulate deeper insights into issues that matter across early childhood and beyond. Most of all, these questions have ensured that CYFS will continue its pursuit of answers that produce visible results.

Efforts Help Children Get Ready for School



WHAT CAN FAMILIES DO TO PREPARE THEIR CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL? HOW CAN PRESCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES HELP SUPPORT THE DISADVANTAGED AND DEVELOPMENTALLY DELAYED? STUDIES ARE SHOWING THAT A CYFS-DEVELOPED APPROACH HAS SOME ANSWERS.

To students, getting ready for school typically means brushing their teeth, deciding what to wear and grabbing some breakfast before jumping on the bus.

At CYFS, Getting Ready means giving children their best chance to succeed when they arrive.

The center's top researchers have invested countless hours investigating the impacts of Getting Ready, a CYFS-developed intervention approach designed to strengthen parent-child interactions and foster family-school partnerships that improve the educa-

tional prospects of very young children at risk for developmental delays.

Rather than focus on fixed protocols and curricula, the approach provides a model for cultivating relationships and promoting continuity that can be implemented within the context of existing preschool programs. Preschool teachers periodically visit the homes of participating families to affirm parents' skills, explore expectations for children, share developmental information, observe parent-child interactions, and suggest or model practices that support learning. Parents, teachers and trained consultants also collaborate to specify goals, assess children's performance in multiple areas, and co-develop research-supported strategies that build children's competencies.

Based on the results of several recent studies, the approach seems primed to give struggling young children – particu-

300



A TOTAL OF 300 PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN FROM 75 CLASSROOMS WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE ONGOING EVALUATION OF *GETTING READY*, A CYFS-DEVELOPED INTERVENTION APPROACH DESIGNED TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL PROSPECTS OF CHILDREN AT RISK FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS.

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The earlier we can intervene to promote positive outcomes for young children at risk, the better.

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Two recent studies have suggested that **Getting Ready** improves a wide range of developmentally important outcomes, from language, pre-reading and early writing skills to parental warmth, sensitivity and support for children's autonomy.



larly those hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds or dealing with disabilities – opportunities to make progress that will improve their prospects as they move through school.

A 2011 study by CYFS Director Susan Sheridan and colleagues found that Getting Ready improved the language, pre-reading and early writing skills of children enrolled in the Head Start preschool program. The observed improvements were magnified among children with developmental concerns and learning delays, along with non-native English speakers.

In 2012, CYFS researchers published another study that demonstrated the intervention's impact on the parents of children enrolled in Early

Head Start. The investigation found that participating parents displayed higher-quality interactions with their children, showing more warmth, sensitivity and support for their children's autonomy than those who did not participate.

Now, with the assistance of a recently awarded \$3.2 million U.S. Department of Education grant, CYFS is gauging Getting Ready's capacity to close the persistent achievement gap facing disadvantaged children. Because children who enter school behind their more privileged peers traditionally fail to catch up, the new study will examine Getting Ready's effects on the cognition, language and social-emotional maturity of those facing the greatest deficits.

CYFS Research Associate Professor Lisa Knoche, a co-developer of Getting Ready, believes the current study will confirm that this multi-faceted approach can successfully address the root causes that have allowed the achievement gap to persist.

"Closing the achievement gap in education requires a comprehensive approach that targets multiple societal layers," Knoche said. "The earlier we can intervene to promote positive outcomes for young children at risk, the better."

Learning & Problem-Solving STEM from Robotics



WHAT DO ROBOTS HAVE IN COMMON WITH TEACHING SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH? QUITE A BIT, AS SOME INNOVATIVE CYFS RESEARCH HAS RECENTLY DEMONSTRATED.

In the past, robots symbolized the distant future. Yet even as the world now transforms yesterday's science fiction into today's reality, CYFS is discovering that robotics holds the capacity to direct the future of American education – from outside the classroom.

CYFS Research Professor Gwen Nugent is investigating how robotics can stimulate the minds and stir the spirits of tomorrow's potential leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) – areas in which American students currently lag behind many of their international peers.

"We are not turning out enough qualified graduates to fill the current job vacancies in the STEM areas," Nugent said. "In order to ensure a high-quality future STEM workforce, we must take steps to encourage students to get involved in STEM activities and develop scientific and technological literacy."

Inspired by robotics' potential to help students translate abstract science and math concepts into concrete applications, Nugent served as co-



CYFS researchers have found that robotics can enhance students' STEM-related learning and problem-solving skills.

editor of the 2012 reference book "Robotics in K-12 Education: A New Technology for Learning." She also co-authored chapters that feature findings from her recent research, which has investigated how summer camps and competitions designed around robotics and GPS technologies can influence middle school students' STEM outcomes.

In collaborating with CYFS Faculty Affiliates Brad Barker, Associate Professor of 4-H Youth Development, and Neal Grandgenett, Professor of Teacher Education, Nugent has concluded that both camps and competitions enhance students' STEM-related learning, self-efficacy and problem-solving skills. The team further deter-

mined that camp participants exhibit more positive attitudes toward STEM, along with more interest in engineering- and math-focused career paths.

"As part of building and programming robots," said Nugent, "kids are learning critical math, science and engineering skills that can potentially contribute to their productive participation in the STEM workforce of the future."

As she continues studying the implementation of robots outside traditional classroom settings, Nugent noted that their inherent appeal – the same that once inspired yesteryear's science fiction – has made them uniquely suited for improving students' STEM literacy.

"Kids are drawn to robots – they love being in control of a robot's actions and making it follow their commands," Nugent said. "As a result, robotics has become a natural vehicle to achieve the dual goals of attracting students to STEM careers and furthering their mathematics and science knowledge."



Presentation Cracks the Code on Dyslexia



WHAT IS DYSLEXIA – AND WHAT IS IT NOT? WHY DO TWO RENOWNED SCHOLARS HAVE THIS LEARNING DISABILITY ON THE BRAIN? THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS CAME DURING A CYFS PRESENTATION THAT GAVE ITS AUDIENCE NEW PERSPECTIVES ON A FAMILIAR ISSUE.

The very mention of dyslexia often conjures popular images of backward letters and jumbled words. For all the attention dyslexia has received, however, misinformation and uncertainty about the disorder continue to persist.

CYFS Faculty Affiliates Dennis and Victoria Molfese took aim at dispelling the myths and informing the conversation surrounding dyslexia during an April 2012 presentation in the CYFS Creating Connections Speaker Series, “The Brain’s Role in Dyslexia: A True Story with a Happy Ending.” The researchers began separating fact from fiction by defining what dyslexia is: a brain-based learning disability characterized by difficulties with spelling,

manipulating speech sounds, and decoding complex words.

The Molfeses then dissected common misconceptions, emphasizing that dyslexia does not arise from typical vision problems, stem simply from low IQ, or affect more males than females. However, they did confirm that genetics play a role in dyslexia – and that the intricate nature of the English language makes its readers especially predisposed to the disorder.

As foremost experts on cognitive development and brain recording techniques, the Molfeses proceeded to provide results from multiple studies – including several of their own – that have incorporated MRI and EEG

technology to literally get inside the heads of dyslexics. The researchers demonstrated how these techniques, in tandem with several reading tasks, can help predict future reading skills and identify risk for dyslexia even among infants and young children. Using these results, they also revealed the promising impacts of interventions designed specifically to address the challenges of dyslexia.

In raising the visibility of dyslexia research, the presentation exemplified the purpose of the CYFS Creating Connections Speaker Series – and offered a glimpse into the tangible outcomes originating from the expanding network of CYFS affiliates.

Visit cyfs.unl.edu to view the presentation from Dennis and Victoria Molfese. Dennis serves as Director of the newly established Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, while Victoria is a Chancellor’s Professor of Child, Youth and Family Studies at UNL.



M G P X O Z W N Y J H F E B V S A L R Q O H C U W I D T
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I C F P L K B D Z N O R Q J M E H A W X Y S P J Z T D S

Initiative Helps Elevate Haitian Education



HOW DO PEOPLE CONTEND WITH WIDESPREAD POVERTY AND THE RAVAGES OF A NATURAL DISASTER? THE PEOPLE OF HAITI HAVE KEPT THEIR HEADS UP, THEIR MINDS OPEN AND THEIR FEET MOVING. CYFS DIRECTOR SUSAN SHERIDAN HAS TAKEN A CUE – AND INSPIRATION – FROM THEM.

CYFS Director Susan Sheridan had seen dilapidated schools and met impoverished students before traveling to Haiti in late 2011. Yet nothing had prepared her for what she encountered there.

Classrooms missing roofs and walls. Teachers using tarp as chalkboards. Children lacking access to basic education. And, amidst it all, the indomitable spirit of people working to improve each other's lives.

Sheridan experienced these dual realities when she accompanied a medical mission to La Montagne (mawn-TYN'), Haiti, a beautiful but historically poor mountainside community devastated

by a 2010 earthquake. While there, Sheridan met with leaders of La Montagne schools and a local association committed to improving the educational prospects of Haitian youth. Their collective resolve in the face of such poverty left an indelible impression.

"Relative to the standards of life as we know it, conditions in La Montagne might seem destitute and unfathomable. Yet there is a strong drive among educators, clergy and caregivers to improve the quality of life for the people of La Montagne, and that is very contagious," Sheridan said. "Most people work without pay but still assume responsibility for their fellow person. The sentiment is clear: Perseverance and hard work will begin to make an impact."

Looking for ways to make a long-term impact, Sheridan soon began collaborating with the Wisconsin-based Yonn Ede Lot (YEL) Association, a nonprofit organization that supports the efforts of

50%
OF HAITIAN CHILDREN DO NOT
ATTEND PRIMARY SCHOOL

80%
OF HAITIAN CHILDREN DO NOT
ATTEND SECONDARY SCHOOL



UNESCO RECENTLY REPORTED THAT HAITI IS THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE AMERICAS WITH A YOUTH LITERACY RATE OF LESS THAN 80 PERCENT. THE COUNTRY'S EDUCATIONAL STRUGGLES ARE TIED TO ITS POVERTY: ACCORDING TO UNICEF, MORE THAN HALF OF HAITI'S POPULATION LIVES BELOW THE INTERNATIONAL POVERTY LINE OF \$1.25 PER DAY – MAKING IT THE POOREST COUNTRY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.

Because many Haitian schools receive little financial support from their government, they must charge admission fees that many families cannot afford.



Thanks to the generosity shown by friends of CYFS, **Elevating Haitian Education** recently ensured that 51 Haitian students can afford the tuition to attend another year of school. To make a contribution, please visit cyfs.unl.edu/haiti.



La Montagne community groups to catalyze improvements in education and other arenas. With YEL's assistance, CYFS quickly joined the cause by creating its own initiative: Elevating Haitian Education.

La Montagne leaders, YEL and Elevating Haitian Education are working to address several areas of immediate need. Because many Haitian schools receive little financial support from their government, they must charge admission fees that many families cannot afford. UNICEF recently estimated that 50 percent of Haiti's children do not attend even primary school, while 80 percent fail to reach secondary school.

This is especially true in rural areas such as La Montagne, where the headmaster of The Renaissance School de-

scribed his potential students as the "poorest of the poor" Haitian children. Many of these children lack shoes, pens, notebooks and other basic supplies required by the schools. Students who can afford to attend must sit in classrooms torn apart by the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that claimed more than 200,000 lives in January 2010. The earthquake left La Montagne's schools in need of extensive structural repairs essential for the shelter and safety of their students.

"I don't feel sorry for the Haitian people," Sheridan said. "Rather, I feel compelled to help them meet their own goals. With my own privilege comes responsibility, and that feeling is overwhelming when spending time in a place like La Montagne."



ELEVATING HAITIAN EDUCATION

Empowering the Children of La Montagne, Haiti

Friends of CYFS from across the country have generously contributed to Elevating Haitian Education. To join them – and learn more about La Montagne – please visit cyfs.unl.edu/haiti.

Teachers Step Beyond Classroom to Continue Learning



DO TEACHERS BENEFIT FROM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COACHING? A NATIONWIDE SURVEY AND TRUE-TO-LIFE CASE STUDY HAVE SHONE NEEDED LIGHT ON THE PROMISE, CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT OF THESE WIDESPREAD EFFORTS.

CYFS subscribes to the belief that learning is a lifelong process – especially for those who spend their lives teaching.

Accordingly, the CYFS-housed National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed) recently concluded two studies that have yielded intriguing lessons about educator-focused professional development.

TEACHERS SPEAK

R²Ed conducted a survey of 268 rural teachers and 327 non-rural educators from 43 states. Fittingly named Teachers Speak, the project gleaned insights into K-5 teachers' professional development experiences, beliefs about educational practices,

and classroom implementation of those practices.

The R²Ed survey revealed that rural teachers had professional development experiences that closely reflected those of their suburban and urban peers. Rural and non-rural educators, for instance, reported devoting virtually the same number of hours to their best professional development opportunity. Moreover, both sets of teachers said their best experiences occurred face-to-face, rather than via distance technology.

The R²Ed team also detected key differences, discovering that non-rural instructors enjoy better access to professional development mentoring at the school, district and university levels. Rural teachers reported a greater reliance on workshops coordinated by regional or state personnel, but also claimed greater collaboration with their colleagues both during and outside their professional development.



Todd Glover, PhD

Ultimately, Teachers Speak determined that teachers who participate in professional development generally acquire a greater appreciation for the topics covered by it – an appreciation that carries over in the form of classroom instruction.

“The results from the Teachers Speak survey provide valuable information about teachers' instructional content knowledge and the relationship between the receipt of professional development and their practice in the classroom,” said Todd Glover, a CYFS

The Teachers Speak survey coordinated by R²Ed gathered information from 268 rural teachers and 327 non-rural educators in 43 states.



Research Associate Professor who helped lead the project. “This information is useful for identifying future professional development needs and informing future investigations of methods of support for rural elementary school teachers.”

CASE IN POINT

Sue Ellen DeChenne, a former R²Ed Postdoctoral Fellow and current CYFS Faculty Affiliate, led a case study that investigated whether coaching can help science and math teachers incorporate inquiry-grounded instruction into their classrooms.

The study, which had veteran teachers guiding peers to develop engineering-based lesson plans, showed that short-term coaching successfully facilitates these efforts – to a point. DeChenne found that participating teachers improved their knowledge

and application of both guided inquiry strategies and engineering concepts. However, she also learned that these teachers struggled to articulate concepts and generate questions that would lead students to discover these ideas on their own, as guided inquiry intends. DeChenne noted that this information provides a starting point for addressing such issues.

“Understanding where teachers struggle with implementing guided inquiry is the first step in the coaching process,” she said.

DeChenne and her colleagues also concluded that changing teachers’ entrenched attitudes requires long-term coaching – which might occur throughout the school year rather than only during summer breaks. She hopes that such insights can be used to improve inquiry coaching, which



Sue Ellen DeChenne, PhD

she sees as essential for schools transitioning to the increasingly popular teaching approach.

“Because guided inquiry is [so different from] standard science classroom practice in the United States, teachers need to learn how to use this approach. Professional development is instrumental in helping teachers learn how to develop lessons and teach them in this manner.”



THE STUDIES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COACHING WERE CONDUCTED THROUGH THE CYFS-HOUSED *NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON RURAL EDUCATION*.

Researchers Assemble Building Blocks for Early Childhood Practice & Policy



HOW DO EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCHERS GET THE RESULTS OF THEIR WORK INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO CAN USE THEM? GATHERING EDUCATORS, INTERVENTIONISTS AND ADMINISTRATORS FROM ACROSS THE STATE OF NEBRASKA IS A GOOD START.

The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools surveyed the landscape and mapped the future of early childhood research, practice and policy when it assembled the state's top minds for an April 2012 summit in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Co-sponsored by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and organized by Lisa Knoche, the second CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood featured 16 presentations of research findings in early learning and development, family engagement, professional development, and the economic impacts of early intervention. Subsequent discussions about

translating this research into practice and policy took place among the approximately 150 scholars, educators, interventionists and administrators in attendance.

Arthur Reynolds, Professor at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development, gave a keynote address on the history of early childhood development programs and his own research on Child-Parent Centers. Numerous CYFS faculty and affiliates also addressed studies devoted to early learning and development. Their presentations covered topics ranging from the effectiveness of early childhood reading and math initiatives to the impacts of temperament, natural environments and sleep habits on children's cognitive, academic and social functioning.

Family engagement researchers focused on parental involvement in early language and literacy programs, specifically those tailored to children living in poverty and



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute

THE CYFS SUMMIT ON RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD WAS CO-SPONSORED BY THE BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE BUFFETT INSTITUTE, VISIT BUFFETTINSTITUTE.NEBRASKA.EDU.

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**SCHOLARS
EDUCATORS
INTERVENTIONISTS
& ADMINISTRATORS**



Right: Arthur Reynolds, Professor at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development, gave a keynote address on the history of early childhood development programs and his own research on Child-Parent Centers.



rural communities. Those studying professional development shared their observations on the interactions between coaches and educators, along with the influences of mentoring on teachers' classroom performance. Summit attendees also gained insights into the economic growth, cost savings and policy implications related to Nebraska's investment in early childhood education and programming.

The summit concluded with a panel – featuring a researcher, two administrative practitioners and a policy expert – that offered reactions to the day's presentations and suggestions on how Nebraska's early childhood leaders should direct their future efforts.

Marjorie Kostelnik, Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-

Lincoln, provided perspectives on the summit during her closing remarks.

"It's really exciting for us to bring together all these different communities of early childhood education and all the different sectors of people who have a really keen interest and passion for [this]," said Kostelnik, also a CYFS Faculty Affiliate.

"Today, some of you heard research that reinforced ideas; some of you heard research that stretched your ideas; and some of you may have heard research that began to change your ideas," Kostelnik said. "And if you did, that was a good thing – because that's what this conference is about."



The summit featured 16 presentations on early learning and development, family engagement, professional development, and the economic impacts of early intervention. To learn more about these presentations – and view the summit's keynote presentation and panel discussion – visit cyfs.unl.edu/ecs/2012.

Research Spans Distance Between East & West



WHEN DOES RESEARCH BECOME A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE? WHEN A CONFERENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG UNITES EMERGING MINDS FROM BOTH EAST AND WEST.

While visiting Hong Kong in late 2011, CYFS Student Affiliates Amanda Witte and Kadie Dooley discovered that research does not get lost in translation.

As doctoral candidates in educational psychology, Witte and Dooley were among a handful of students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Education and Human Sciences who earned the opportunity to present research papers at the University of Hong Kong.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Witte shared her research on parents who cultivate the talents of child prodigies. With the assistance of her advisor, CYFS Faculty Affiliate Kenneth Kiewra, Witte interviewed the parents of 24 children who displayed exceptional abilities in music, chess, figure skating and other arenas. These children proceeded to win many national and world championships, including two Olympic silver medals and a Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Witte asked the parents of these children about four factors previously linked to talent development – early experience, mentoring, practice and motivation – and found that parents play important roles in each area. Nearly all of the interviewed parents introduced children to their respective talents. Every child benefitted from elite coaching, which many families provided themselves or obtained by traveling great distances and making remarkable financial sacrifices. Witte discovered that parents made similar sacrifices to manage their children's practices and competitions. At home, these parents modeled hard work and encouraged their children to set lofty goals.

By mirroring her subjects' willingness to go to great lengths, Witte expanded CYFS efforts to communicate its research on a global scale.



Amanda Witte



Two CYFS Doctoral Affiliates were among four students who earned the Hong Kong Travel Award from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Education and Human Sciences. The award aims to promote the exchange of ideas and cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship between UNL and the University of Hong Kong.

MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY

Previous research has linked recess to the development of social skills – and found that conflicts beginning there can lead to emotional, social and academic issues. To address the potential roots of these issues, Dooley's study asked 301 second- through fifth-graders to identify common playground locations for both positive and negative play among students. Their responses revealed that the five areas most cited as havens of cooperation

were also perceived as the sites of most conflict. Students also indicated that classmates' traits – rather than traditionally cited factors such as adult supervision, overcrowding or playground characteristics – best explained the nature of recess interactions.

Dooley and her advisor, CYFS Faculty Affiliate Beth Doll, have consequently proposed that student-marked playground maps can inform school-

specific interventions to maximize positive play and minimize conflict during recess.

In demonstrating how research can foster collaboration and cooperation, Dooley's study personified the spirit of a successful trip to a city renowned as a place where East meets West.



IN ADDITION TO PRESENTING HER RESEARCH ON ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' PLAYGROUND INTERACTIONS, KADIE DOOLEY (FAR LEFT) LEARNED ABOUT THE WORK CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG.



Publications

In disseminating important research findings, CYFS Affiliates aim to advance the scientific knowledge base while informing practice, policy and future research related to children, youth, families and schools. Select publications are listed below, with Faculty and Student Affiliates in bold.

EARLY EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

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Landscape of Support

SNAPSHOT OF CUMULATIVE CYFS GRANT ACTIVITY

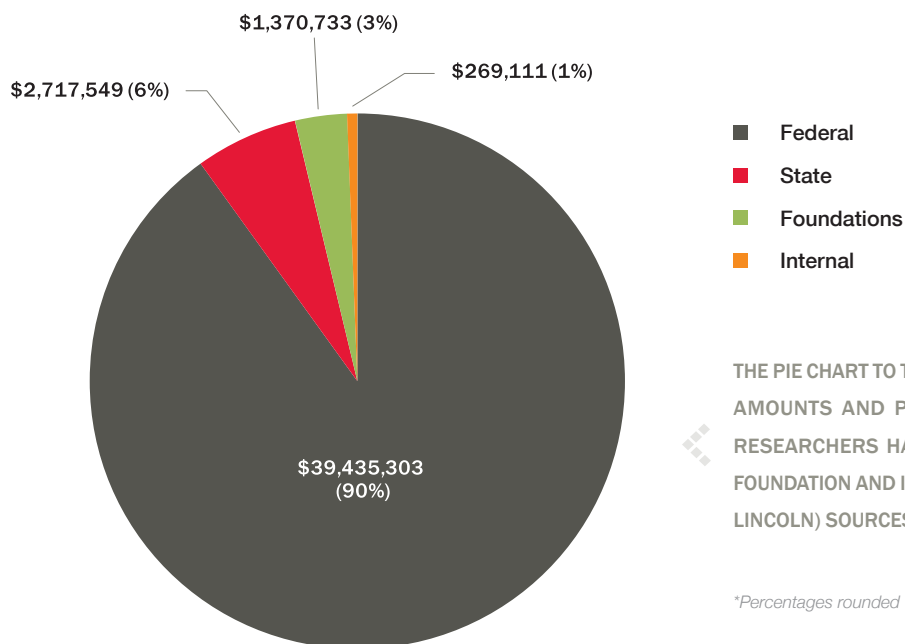
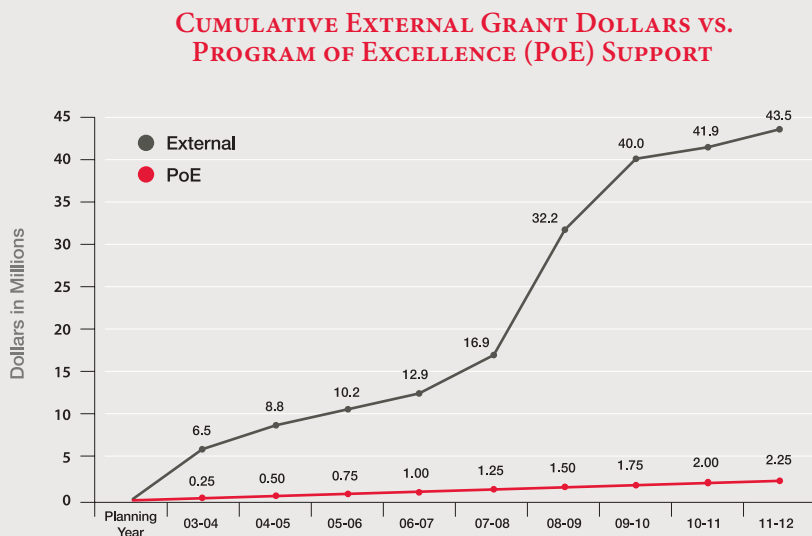
Total Program of Excellence Funds to Date	\$2,250,000
Total Number of Grants Submitted through CYFS	237
Total Dollar Amount of Grants Submitted	\$199,372,999
Total Number of Grants Funded	101
"Hit Rate" of Funded Grants (based on known decisions)	47 %
Total Dollar Amount of External Grants Funded	\$43,523,584
Total Dollar Amount of Internal Grants Funded	\$269,111
Total Dollar Amount of All Grants Funded	\$43,792,695
Percentage of Grant Dollars from Federal Agencies	90%
Return Rate to UNL for Every \$1 Invested	\$20.84



SUPPORT FOR THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS (CYFS) IS GENERATED PRIMARILY THROUGH PROGRAM OF EXCELLENCE (POE) FUNDS AND EXTERNAL GRANTS. THE TABLE ABOVE HIGHLIGHTS INFORMATION REGARDING GRANTS SUBMITTED, GRANTS AWARDED, "HIT RATE," TOTAL DOLLAR AMOUNTS AWARDED, AND RETURN TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN SINCE THE CENTER'S INCEPTION IN 2004.



THE LINE GRAPH TO THE RIGHT ILLUSTRATES THE CENTER'S CUMULATIVE EXTERNAL FUNDING (I.E., FEDERAL, STATE AND FOUNDATION) RELATIVE TO PROGRAM OF EXCELLENCE (POE) SUPPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN.



THE PIE CHART TO THE LEFT SHOWS THE CUMULATIVE DOLLAR AMOUNTS AND PROPORTIONS OF FUNDING THAT CYFS RESEARCHERS HAVE GARNERED FROM FEDERAL, STATE, FOUNDATION AND INTERNAL (I.E., UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN) SOURCES.

**Percentages rounded to nearest 1%*

Active Grants & Contracts

The following grants and contracts received new or continued funding during the 2011 CYFS fiscal year.

FEDERAL AWARDS (\$29,320,966)

Administration for Children and Families

Identifying Risk for and Preventing Child Maltreatment in Early Head Start Families

PIs: Grace Hubel, David Hansen, Lisa Knoche, Mary Fran Flood

Parental Literacy Belief and Engagement in Homes of Dual Language Learners: A Mixed Methods Study

PIs: Lisa Knoche, Sandra Plata-Potter

Teacher-Child Interaction Training

PIs: Christopher Campbell, David Hansen, Mary Fran Flood

National Science Foundation

Central Great Plains Climate Change Education Partnership (CGP-CCEP) Proposal: Expanding our Reach and Research

PIs: Lisa Pytlik-Zillig, Roger Bruning

iLOG: Embedding and Validating Empirical Usage Intelligence In Learning Objects

PIs: Ashok Samal, Leen-Kiat Soh, Gwen Nugent

Scale-Up: National Robotics in 4-H: Workforce Skills for the 21st Century

PIs: Bradley Barker, Viacheslav Adamchuk, Gwen Nugent, Neal Grandgenett, Bing Chen

U.S. Department of Education

A Meta-Analysis of Parent Involvement Interventions and Family-School Partnerships' Effects on Student Outcomes

PIs: Susan Sheridan, Elizabeth Moorman Kim, S. Natasha Beretvas

A Randomized Trial of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) in Rural Educational Settings: Efficacy for Elementary Students with Disruptive Behavior

PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, Gina Kunz, James Bovaird

Development of a Three-Tiered Model in Early Intervention to Address Language and Literacy Needs of Children at Risk

PIs: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche, Judith Carta, Charles Greenwood

Efficacy of Supplemental Early Vocabulary Connections Instruction for English Language Learners

PIs: J. Ron Nelson, James Bovaird

Language Bases of Skilled Reading Comprehension

PIs: Tiffany Hogan, J. Ron Nelson, James Bovaird

Mountain Prairie Upgrade Partnership-Early Childhood (MPUP-EC)

PIs: Christine Marvin, Malinda Eccarius

Mountain Prairie Upgrade Partnership-Itinerant (MPUP-I)

PI: Malinda Eccarius

National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)

PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz, James Bovaird

Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research on Consultation-Based Interventions for Students with Social and Behavioral Concerns

PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, James Bovaird

Rural Language and Literacy Connections

PIs: Lisa Knoche, Helen Raikes

Training School Psychologists in Response-to-Intervention Implementation and Systems Change

PIs: Merilee McCurdy, Edward Daly III, Tanya Ihlo, Gina Kunz



STATE AWARDS (\$1,772,012)**Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education***Coaching Science Inquiry Professional Development*

PIs: Sue Ellen DeChenne, Gina Kunz, Gwen Nugent, Jon Pedersen, Laurence Rilett

Lincoln Public Schools*ExCITE Training*

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LPS Building Bridges

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Nebraska Department of Education*Nebraska Early Development Network: Professional Upgrade*

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State-Wide Response-to-Intervention Consortium for Training and Evaluation

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FOUNDATION / OTHER AWARDS (\$1,074,765)*ArtsReach and Partners in Education Program Evaluation II*

Funding Sources: Dana Foundation, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, LIED Center, Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraskans for the Arts

Program PI: Nancy Engen-Wedin

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Building Bridges Through Relationships: A High School Dropout Prevention Program

Funding Source: Woods Charitable Fund

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Child Temperament and Classroom Processes as Predictors of Academic and Social Outcomes in Preschool

Funding Source: UNL Office of Research and Economic Development

PIs: Kathleen Moritz Rudasill, Victoria Molfese

Early Childhood Course Conversion

Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Fund

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Early Steps to School Success

Funding Source: Save the Children Foundation

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Fresh Air and Sunshine: The Science Underpinning the Benefits of Nature for Children's Development

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Investigation of Typically Developing Preschoolers' Attitudes toward Peers with Disabilities in Two Different Social-Cultural Contexts

Funding Source: UNL College of Education and Human Sciences International Seed

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Phase II: Coaching Support Evaluation

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

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Research Agenda on Family-School Partnerships: An Interdisciplinary Examination of the State of the Science and Critical Needs

Funding Source: American Educational Research Association

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Rethinking Approaches to Valuing Early Childhood Education in Nebraska

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

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Studies on Closing the Achievement Gap: Developing Methodologies and Conducting Exploratory Analyses Using the Nebraska Student Staff Record System Data (NSSRS)

Funding Source: UNL Agricultural Research Division

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